Book reviews

Arie Verhagen: *Constructions of Intersubjectivity: Discourse, Syntax, and Cognition.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 272 pp.

While cognitive linguistics has been gradually establishing itself as a vocal participant in discussions on the way to bridge the gap between syntax and semantics, it has also spoken in many voices. The shared concerns of Cognitive Grammar, Construction Grammar, and Mental Spaces Theory have often been overshadowed by the differences resulting from different focus of each of the theories. Verhagen's new book is thus a notable step forward, in that it proposes a framework which mediates among the more specific concerns of other theories. The methodology developed is a novel approach to syntactic constructions, which builds on studies in all of the cognitive linguistics models mentioned above, while also including discourse phenomena in a natural way and responding directly to much of the common linguistic knowledge on how syntactic constructions work.

   The book starts with a chapter explaining the idea of "intersubjectivity". Linguistic utterances are seen as meaningful not only by virtue of

prompting appropriate categorizations, but also as tools in managing construals across different discourse participants. Every utterance relies on a construal configuration. The configuration consists of two elements: the subject of conceptualization, or ground (which includes the discourse participants, the communicative event they participate in, their shared knowledge, and the circumstances of that event) and the object of conceptualization. The crucial feature of this configuration is the presence of more than one participant in the ground — so that any utterance, even one without a specific addressee, is construed as an instrument of communication. The configuration allows one to represent the aspect of communication which Verhagen puts in the centre of his attention — the argumentative and inferential nature of all communicative acts. While discourse participants bring their own subjectivities to the communicative event, they formulate their thoughts in the way which inevitably addresses the communicative needs or expectations of other participants. Even though different communicative acts differ in the selection of the aspects of the construal put on stage, they rely on the same configuration.

Verhagen is specifically interested in the syntactic means of managing the relations between various participants as cognitive agents within the ground. In other words, he describes syntactic constructions which play a crucial role in the management and coordination of conceptualizations held by different participants. His examples range over a broad spectrum of constructions — from negation, through complementation, to discourse connectives. Some of the constructions come under this kind of cognitive linguistic analysis for the first time, while others, such as negation or *let alone*-construction, receive a revised description, coherent with more general claims about the role of syntactic form in communication. The argument is illustrated with data from English and from Dutch.

In Chapter 2, Verhagen develops the understanding of negation earlier proposed by Fauconnier (1994, 1997), whereby negating an aspect of the utterance automatically calls up the positive space being negated. For example, by saying *I don't have an iPod*, the speaker is implicitly referring to a construal whereby owning an iPod was expected or desirable. Verhagen develops the argument to further distinguish sentential uses of negation from morphological ones, and explain the differences in the construals prompted by utterances such as *It's is not possible*, *It is impossible* and *It is not impossible*. It appears that the constructions using sentential negation construct two mental spaces (one positive and the other negative), while the morphological forms such as *impossible* do not. While none of the utterances explicitly addresses the implied "positive" space or presents it as having been communicated, the construal suggested by *not* clearly distinguishes the meaning of *It is impossible* (one space) from the meaning

of *It is not possible* (two spaces). As Verhagen argues, constructions like negation, which favor an intersubjective construal, support the idea that ''cognitive coordination'' among different discourse participants underlies very basic syntactic and morphological choices.

The intersubjective function of negation is further used to elucidate some yet untackled aspects of the *let alone*-construction, as described by Fillmore et al. (1988), focusing on the inference-canceling role of the construction. The concept of the grammar's contribution to argumentation is further explored in the analysis of adverbs such as *barely* and *almost*, which also play the role of intersubjectively regulating inferential processes, rather than relying on the descriptive content of the terms they modify. These analyses reinforce the claim, central to Verhagen's framework, that the intersubjective role of grammatical forms is in fact primary with respect to their descriptive role. Most current theories of meaning give the central role to establishing the relationship between the object and the subject of conceptualization (categorization, description, etc.), while assuming further that intersubjective coordination is a secondary phenomenon, relying strictly on the context of use. The point Verhagen makes, first with respect to negation, and then other syntactic constructions, is that the intersubjective construal is in fact at the core of the structure of grammar.

Chapter 3 describes several complementation constructions, clarifying the ambiguities and inconsistencies inherent in the standard accounts. Indeed, the concerns addressed in this chapter will sound familiar to anyone who taught descriptive grammar of complementation constructions in English and struggled to maintain the coherence of the general argument. For example, most descriptive accounts assume (tacitly or explicitly) that there is no crucial difference between saying that *John saw (knew, thought) that the situation was dangerous* and *John saw (knew, thought) something*. Both treat such sentences as describing the events of seeing, knowing, or thinking, with the direct object slot being filled either by a nominal or by a clause. In Verhagen's terms, standard accounts thus treat the matrix clause as an object of conceptualization, while the complement clause *the situation was dangerous* as subordinate to it. This view, as Verhagen observes, relies on the assumption that both instances of direct objects should be handled by the same general rules. As Verhagen argues throughout the chapter, the matrix clause is not an object of conceptualization (in other words, such sentences are not about ''seeing'', ''knowing'' or ''thinking''). Instead, they function in the intersubjective dimension, so that the evaluation central to the construction's meaning, that the situation can be seen as dangerous, is attributed to John. The construal thus invites discourse participants to construe the situation from

the point of view of John, and not the speaker or the hearer. Complementation constructions can consequently be seen as a tool for ''putting conceptualizers on stage'', that is, enriching the immediately available construals with the perspective represented by a participant not profiled in the ground and clarifying the degree to which the speaker aligns herself with that perspective. The approach proposed further suggests that the clarity of the distinction between matrix clauses and subordinate clauses (complements) on the one hand and hypotactic clauses (adjuncts) on the other may be less clear than is commonly assumed. Relying on earlier work by, among others, Diessel and Tomasello (2001), Verhagen investigates the role of complementation in discourse, to conclude that adjunct clauses are primarily related to the establishment of coherence relations, while complementation deals with intersubjective coordination. That is, the so-called matrix clause serves the function of designating the ''onstage conceptualizer'' in order to present the specific construal as not inherently aligned with the ground configuration, including the speaker. The constructions with first- and second-person pronouns in the matrix clause (*You know, I believe*) can also be seen as performing the intersubjective role, but additionally highlighting the ground participant who is saliently invoked in the argument. At the same time, the degree of distance between the ground participant and the onstage conceptualizer may vary from construction to construction.

The argument is elaborated through a discussion of a variety of constructions, such as *It is important that X* or ''long-distance *Wh*-movement''. Apart from giving rise to different linguistic analyses, these are proverbially difficult subjects to teach in a descriptive grammar class based entirely on syntactic criteria. The clarifications offered by Verhagen may not immediately produce pedagogically satisfying textbooks, but they might help teachers to come up with more appealing classroom explanations. The approach to complementation phenomena Verhagen proposes also has the advantage of being easily applicable to natural discourse, especially written texts. As some carefully selected examples clearly show, the so-called matrix clauses and the so-called complement clauses have different roles in discourse. In longer stretches of written texts clauses which take complementation organize the intersubjective aspect of the text (in a sense, do not really enrich content or move the story forward), while the clauses which are likely to be complements contribute to the objective dimension in a direct manner. The smooth flow of text, then, depends crucially on the interaction between these modes of text construction, so that the reader is constantly brought up to date as to the relationship between the content described and the discourse ground it is presented against. Different ''voices'' of potential conceptualizers

who are put on stage are identified and coordinated in the intersubjective dimension of the text, while the content dimension never appears disembodied or unmediated.

At the same time, one should keep in mind that the intersubjective dimension of a text may be achieved constructionally, not necessarily through a direct attribution of objective construals to specific conceptualizers. The framework proposed by Verhagen can thus be naturally and revealingly extended into the realm of narrative discourse, especially constructions generally known as indirect and free indirect speech. These represented speech and thought constructions have already been addressed from the point of view of mental space configurations (cf. Sanders and Redeker 1996) as well as cognitive and functional criteria (Vandelanotte 2004a, 2000b), but many questions remain unanswered. Although Verhagen only mentions represented speech in passing, the ''intersubjectivity'' approach is possibly the single most promising linguistic tool for clarifying the complex interactions between meaning and form in speech and thought representation.

The last major part of the book discusses concessive and causal discourse connectives. Given that these, similarly to all adverbial constructions, consist of two clauses, they also increase the complexity of the intersubjectivity approach by profiling two situations in the objective domain, which consequently can be viewed differently by the participants in the subjective domain. While Verhagen's analysis focuses on *because*, *although* and their Dutch equivalents, it can be naturally extended over other constructions with similar meanings.

Much of the discussion attempts to clarify the differences and similarities in the interpretation of causal and concessive constructions which have earlier been described (following Sweetser 1990) in terms of cognitive domains. In Sweetser's original analysis the polysemy of conjunctions such as *because* (compare *John passed his exams because he worked hard*, which links facts in the content domain, and *John worked hard, because he passed his exams*, which links steps in the reasoning developing in the epistemic domain) postulates a systematic conceptual distinction between domains, which explains constructional phenomena such as intonation and clause-order patterns, while distinguishing different kinds of reasonings involving causality, including the abductive reasoning exemplified by the second example. The approach was also effectively used in some analyses of conditionals (Dancygier 1998; Dancygier and Sweetser 2005).

Verhagen's analysis begins with a reference to Sweetser's observation that concessive conjunctions and coordinate contrasting conjunctions like *but* seem to involve epistemic judgments even in the sentences which might otherwise be considered examples of content domain reasoning.

For example, a concessive statement such as *John failed his exams although he worked hard* relies on the assumed validity of the inference (which Verhagen calls "topos", following Anscombre and Ducrot 1983) whereby hard work should result in success. While this observation is present in most analyses of concessives (König and Siemund 2000; Dancygier 1998; Dancygier and Sweetser 2005), Verhagen goes further than other analyses in that he explains the evocation of the topos as a case of intersubjective meaning, so that the underlying inference is not just negated, but is also attributed to a discourse participant as a part of the mental space configuration. As a result, concessive sentences are naturally "epistemic" in that they override the validity of the belief present in the ground (such that *he passed the exam*), while supporting the generic validity of the topos which licenses that inference. By the same token, the construction as a whole serves an intersubjective role, while also acknowledging some facts in the content domain. This model of constructions involving contrasting beliefs or inferences is further applied to *but*, which is shown to be similar to *although*, while canceling a different inference, and in effect stressing the positive role of "hard work", while also acknowledging the unexpectedness of the failure to pass. Such a model of adverbial constructions involving causality resolves the tension between content and epistemic meaning. It also clarifies the way in which different understandings of causal chains may be applied to the same situation, and shows how the speaker may address the hearer's potential beliefs without contradicting her own.

The framework also proposes a further refinement of the understanding of adverbial clauses (especially *because*-clauses) as asserted or presupposed. While most analyses to date refer these descriptions to the difference between assumptions which are contextually established as being the case (presupposed), and those which are being communicated as facts via the causal construction (asserted), Verhagen proposes that such distinctions are dependent on the speaker's goals in the intersubjective domain. The approach adds a much needed explanation of how these interpretations are arrived at, and, perhaps more importantly, makes it clear that adverbial constructions in general are best described in terms of the speaker's argumentative goals, and not in terms of causal relations actually holding in the objective domain of facts in the world. The discussion of causal connectives thus far has often been burdened with the attempts to establish causality in the world as the first step and address the communicative goals of the construction next. In fact, some of the recent research (Pander Matt and Degand 2001; Pander Matt and Sanders 2000, 2001) has already questioned the entirely "objective" nature of causality as reflected in adverbial constructions, and proposed treating many

instances as representing ''subjective'' construals instead (primarily, this applies to the class of epistemic constructions). Verhagen's proposal not only allows for clearly distinguishing various level of causal structure as communicated by the same utterance, but also argues that the intersubjective goals of communication may take priority in this respect, so that the specific construal is communicated as useful from the point of view of construal management, and not for the sake of faithfulness to some objective reality. In other words, the speaker may use causal chains in a number of ways, often within the same utterance, but even an ostensibly objective causal chain can be communicated for the benefit of the argumentative and inferential goals, and not to establish ''the facts''.

Verhagen's work here focuses on causal and concessive connectives (with a brief excursion into the coordinate *but*), but it is clear that the framework has important consequences for our understanding of other adverbial constructions. The most notable area of interest here is conditionality. Not only have conditionals been talked about in terms similar to causals (content/epistemic/speech act domains, clause order, intonation pattern, etc.), but most analyses of conditionals also assume that conditionality includes causal assumptions in some way. For example, it has been argued (Sweetser 1990; Dancygier 1998; Dancygier and Sweetser 2005) that all conditional protases are causally related to their apodoses (so that when the content of the protasis becomes a fact or is accepted as true, the apodosis indicates the result in the content domain, the conclusion in the epistemic domain, or the speech act performed). Causal chains have been postulated as the link between the clauses of a conditional construction, but also as assumptions underlying conditional reasonings. What is more, negative construals play a significant role in conditionality, perhaps more so than in causal constructions. Not only does explicit negation affect conditionals meanings in important ways, but the concept of counterfactual reading, central to conditionality, relies on the construal which explicitly evokes negative spaces (so that *If it hadn't rained, they would have played tennis* explicitly evokes the ''past rain'' space in its construal). In Dancygier and Sweetser (2005) this aspect of conditionality was treated in terms of alternative spaces, in connection to the understanding of negation earlier proposed by Fauconnier (1994, 1997). This suggests much more that just a correlation between Verhagen's treatment of negation and causality on the one hand, and mental space analyses of related phenomena on the other. It may suggest, for example, that Verhagen's construal configuration can be useful in representing the specific similarities and differences among various constructions with adverbial meaning, including the notoriously elusive coordinate or *NP NP* constructions, such as *One more step and I'll shoot* or *Another day, another dollar*. These

constructions not only use causal links in specific, though implicit ways (refusal to comply will cause shooting, continued work will cause continued income), but are also interesting from the point of view of their argumentative and inferential features. Furthermore, they rely on constructional features (such as clausal or non-clausal form, absence of a connective, tense use, etc.) which are not always aligned with the characteristics of causal constructions distinguished on the basis of their connectives.

In effect, Verhagen's framework is an invitation to further investigate the ways in which constructions reflect underlying mental space construals, and to seek a better explanation of the role of form-meaning mappings. While specific construction grammar frameworks differ in the representation of how meaning emerges out of combinations of lexical and formal features, they do seem to agree that form-meaning correlations are at the centre of construction grammar investigation. What Verhagen's framework appears to propose is an approach which seeks continuity of underlying construals across different constructions. This is potentially a very fruitful approach, which will help explain recurrence of meaning across constructions, especially when it is not paired with the recurrence of form. Many analyses have relied on possible paraphrases to reveal meanings lurking under the surface of the form, as in the case of threats with *or*: sentences like *Stop this or I'll call the cops* have been talked about as "conditionals" because they are paraphrasable with *If you don't stop this, I'll call the cops*. Dancygier and Sweetser (2005) show that the paraphrasability emerges out of the underlying commonality of mental space configurations, and argue that a specific constructional meaning is not always directly reliant on the complete configuration of constructional forms, but may be prompted by a particular salient aspect of form (they referred to the phenomenon as constructional compositionality). What Verhagen's framework suggests is that there are also clusters of constructions which have similar construal-management goals, while using less specific or more varied formal signals. It does not mean that the correlation between form and meaning is weak, but that the formal means suggesting a given use of a construal configuration may be varied and spread across constructions. What we may conclude, then, is that there are possibly two ways in which constructions correlate with mental space configurations. In some cases, individual forms (such as clause-order/sequence-of-events iconicity, or tense) may consistently prompt similar meanings in a range of constructions. In other instances, the opposite may be the case: a basic mental space configuration can be used in a variety of constructions to achieve a similar kind of intersubjective management of construals.

The task of recognizing the formal means of achieving both kinds of cross-constructional correlations is not simple, but it is important. The domain of conditionality mentioned above seems to suggest that it is indeed possible to do that. Counterfactual conditionals such as *If it hadn't rained, they would have played tennis* use specific formal signals of the intended contrary-to-fact construal, such as the verb forms and the *if* connective, but they also rely on the intersubjective role of aspects of the ground, by evoking a positive space signaled by negation and a shared assumption about tennis games being cancelled when it rains. For comparison, a sentence such as *If (as you say) it rained, they didn't play tennis* relies on the same shared topos and the same role of negation (in another clause), but adds an extra layer of intersubjectivity by evoking the belief present in the ground and apparently subscribed to by the addressee, that it did indeed rain. In neither example does the speaker present the assumption about rain in the object domain as the intended goal of communication, but uses it differently, to achieve different intersubjective goals: perhaps to express regret in the first case and to negotiate a conclusion that both participants will accept in the second. There is certainly much more to be said about how the two examples differ in terms of construal and mental space configuration, but one point seems clear: the interaction between local meaning-prompts such as tense use and the global intersubjective goals and inferences is crucial to such constructions. One can thus expect Verhagen's framework to contribute to our understanding of how constructions prompt specific construals at the local level, while managing them argumentatively on the global level.

To conclude, *Constructions of Intersubjectivity* is an important contribution to the study of language. It proposes a clear and convincing analysis of a number of controversial phenomena in syntax, semantics, and the lexicon, while opening new perspectives in the study of language as a communicative tool. The proposed links across cognition, syntax and discourse are sure to inspire further research into an integrated approach to the correlation between form and meaning.

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